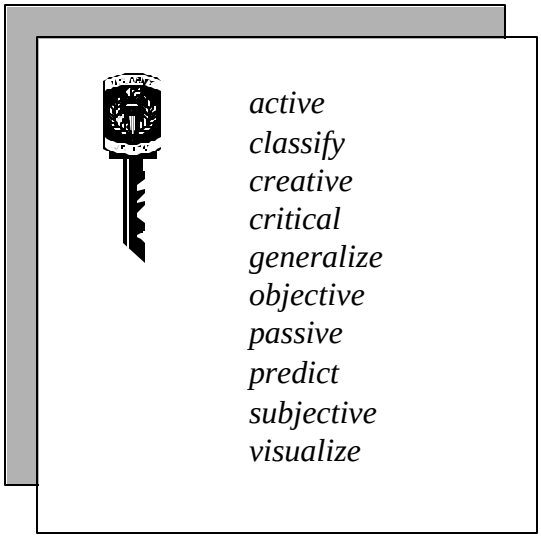
STUDY SKILLS

LESSON 1: BECOMING AN ACTIVE LEARNER



INTRODUCTION

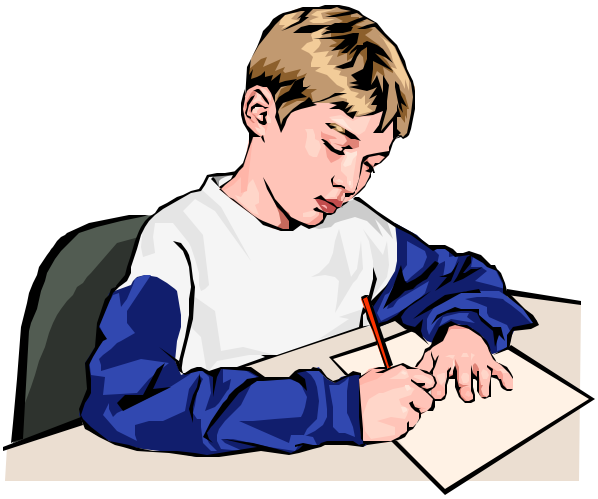
Active learners do not wait for learning to happen — they make it happen. You learned to crawl, to stand up, to walk, and many other things because you wanted to learn them. This desire to learn something made you ask the people around you for help. Active learning is an instinct with which you were born.

WHO ARE ACTIVE LEARNERS?

Active learners display most of these ten basic traits and can do the following:

1. Identify personal goals and the steps necessary to achieve the goals.
2. Use resources. Identify the people and tools available to aid in goal pursuit.
3. Learn how to solve almost any problem they ever have to face.
4. Look at situations objectively.
5. Ask the right questions.
6. Use time well. They organize and set priorities.
7. Apply good reading, studying, and questioning skills to written materials.
8. Apply good listening skills in the classroom.
9. Find patterns and take effective notes to organize materials for studying.
10. Assess progress along the way and revise their plans.

You can probably think of additional traits that active learners possess. In contrast, **passive** learners may work hard, but they do not take charge of the learning processes. Compare the differences between active and passive learners (on the table on the next page).



ACTIVE LEARNER VERSUS PASSIVE LEARNER

PASSIVE LEARNER	*ACTIVE LEARNER*
Approaches learning as "*remembering*."	Approaches learning as "*thinking*."
Reads the textbook, takes some notes, and spends hours trying to memorize those notes.	Reads the textbook, takes some notes using a method that captures the concepts and details. Reviews the notes.
Wastes or misuses a lot of study time. Feels as if there isn't enough time to "remember it all."	Uses study time efficiently. Concentrates on remembering the major concepts and details.
May be able to recall information, but often has problems using this information in contexts other than the textbook's scenario or the way he/she memorized the material. In tests, tends to get confused if the information is not presented in a manner similar to the way he/she memorized the information.	Can recall information and transfer the information to many different contexts. Can use the information to respond to different types of questions in tests.
Tends to see "words" on the page rather than ideas and concepts applicable to various situations.	Looks for the basic concepts and uses those concepts as a structure on which to build secondary concepts and details. Can apply the information to various situations when appropriate.

ACTIVE LEARNERS ARE SELF-DIRECTED

Using active learning, you can solve problems, answer questions, formulate questions of your own, discuss, explain, debate, or brainstorm during class.

CREATIVE AND CRITICAL THINKING

Active learners think carefully. Thinking is a complex activity involving the brain's neurons (nerve cells) linking with other neurons as waves of impulses travel from neuron to neuron. Numerous skills comprise the act of thinking. These skills can be grouped into two categories: **creative** and **critical**.

ACTIVE LEARNING = THINKING	
Creative thinking — examples:	Critical thinking — examples:
Brainstorming	Analyzing
Generalizing	Comparing/Contrasting
Inventing	**Classifying**
Predicting	Evaluating
Visualizing	Prioritizing

Active learners use both critical and creative thinking.

- Use critical thinking to define the problem.
- Use creative thinking to solve it.

The important thing active learners know is when to use each type of thinking. Critical thinking requires an **objective** viewpoint.

Critical thinkers
• Are honest with themselves
• Can resist manipulation
• When encountering a confusing situation, figure out how to overcome it
• Ask good questions
• Base judgments on facts and evidence
• Look for connections between subjects
• Are intellectually independent

OBJECTIVE VERSUS SUBJECTIVE VIEWPOINT

As you develop, you learn to shift from **visualizing** the world as being centered only around yourself (**subjective**) to seeing it in a way that many people can agree on what it means (objective). Objectivity allows you to communicate effectively and persuasively with others. Using objectivity helps you persuade other people and can gain you allies in making changes.

To support critical thinking, you need an objective viewpoint. You can learn to distinguish between objective and subjective observations and reactions.

- If you tell how an event affected you or how you reacted to an event, you are being **subjective**. For example:
  - His criticism of me was totally unjust and it made me angry.
  - That was the funniest movie I've ever seen
- If you tell about an event or relate a fact as anyone might see it, you are being objective. For example:
  - It rained Saturday.
  - Sick children need good medical care.

Keep both subjective and objective viewpoints in mind when you are communicating with other people. Both viewpoints are necessary in life, but learn to use them appropriately. Distinguishing between these viewpoints is especially important when you are asking questions, taking tests, or giving presentations.

Asking Questions

Active learners combine critical thinking and objectivity to ask good questions. They ask questions to get a complete picture and to expand their knowledge. You can't get anywhere without asking questions. To get specific facts, ask clear, concise questions requiring an objective answer. To learn opinions and feelings, ask subjective questions.

Answering Questions

Active learners use both types of thinking — critical and creative — to give good answers to questions. You must recognize whether a question is asking you to be objective or subjective in your answer. Recognizing what type of question is being asked will help you identify whether your answer should be subjective or objective.

Three Question Types	*Related Thinking Type*	*Related Viewpoint*	*Notes*
What? • What are the facts? • What is the evidence or proof?	Critical thinking	Objective	Facts form the basis of most of your studies.
So what? • What do the facts mean? • What conclusion can I draw? • What else do I need to know?	Creative thinking and Critical thinking	Subjective and Objective	Use the facts to form an opinion.
Now what? • What can I do with the information now that I have the facts? • How do the facts link to other information I have?	Creative thinking	Subjective	Use the information to form a pattern or structure on which to build other facts.

Answering questions is treated in more detail in the Test Taking Tips and Strategies of this textbook. For reading, study skills, and test taking, you apply the objective and subjective viewpoints, critical and creative thinking, and techniques for asking questions.

Form the habit of asking questions and learning from everyone you meet. You may be afraid to ask questions because you think people will believe you are not very smart. Don't be afraid. Only the smartest people know how to ask really good questions, and the people who ask them and get good answers get smarter. So can you.

CONCLUSION

Active learning is a method that allows you to participate in class. It takes you beyond the role of passive listener and note taker and allows you to take some direction and initiative during the class. Active learning can encompass a variety of techniques that include small group discussion, role playing, hands-on projects, and teacher driven questioning. The goal is to be part of the process of your own education.